

BVA is right on hunting

vet times

5 mins to read January 18, 2016

Dear editor,

The controversially named Veterinary Association for Wildlife Management (VAWM) has criticised the BVA's opposition to weakening the Hunting Act 2004 (Letters, 14 December issue). The BVA is opposed to allowing more than the current legal limit of two dogs to flush a fox to guns, in the absence of "compelling peer-reviewed evidence" this would result in "more effective and humane pest control". The main evidence cited by the VAWM was an unpublished paper by Naylor and Knott, which found a pack of dogs is more effective at flushing foxes than a pair.

However, dogs in pursuit of quarry are harder to restrain and control, and the difficulty increases substantially when dogs are operating as a pack. Accordingly, it is far more likely such dogs will "accidentally" catch the fox they are pursuing (in violation of the law), or any other wildlife that could stray across their paths. The latter is no small point; earlier this year I was required to provide courtroom testimony concerning the welfare of a deer apparently savaged by an out-of-control hunting pack. Due to its severe injuries, the deer had to be euthanised. There have been a number of such cases. Foxes or animals caught by hounds rarely experience the "quick, clean" deaths sometimes claimed by hunting advocates. In fact, according to a Home Office inquiry into hunting, conducted by Bristol and Cambridge university veterinary pathologists (Barnett, 2000), it is extremely rare for hunted animals to be killed instantly. Multiple bite wounds to the face, head, throat, chest and abdomen are common and, in many cases, foxes are disembowelled prior to death.

The paper cited by the VAWM is far from "compelling peer-reviewed evidence" that dog packs will be more effective and humane, and the BVA is quite right to maintain its opposition to altering the Hunting Act in this way.

Yours faithfully,

Andrew Knight, MANZCVS, DipECAWBM(AWSEL), DACAW, PhD, MRCVS, SFHEA, professor of Animal Welfare and Ethics, director of the Centre for Animal Welfare, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Winchester, Sparkford Road, Winchester SO22 4NR.

Reference

- Barnett A (2000). Vets say hunted foxes die in agony: Home Office post-mortems refute the claims of the hunting lobby by proving blood sports inflict suffering, *The Observer*.